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## CHALLENGES IN SPREADING INFORMATION LITERACY AMONG STUDENTS

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### Abstract:

*Information unleashes our imagination and challenges our preconceptions and thereby provides us with a pathway to personal growth and fulfilment. In this information rich world, where the scope of available information appears limitless, there is a growing need for students to become critical users of information. For students, regardless of their discipline, information literacy skills enable them to master content and give them the confidence to proceed with investigation, be self reliant and have a sense of being in control of their learning. Information literacy is a global phenomenon today and the critical importance of the role of information literacy is gaining increased recognition*

*Information literacy means knowing information about information. It refers to a constellation of skills revolving around information research and use. Dissemination of information alone is not sufficient instead the user of information should be taught to make the best use of the options provided to enhance their knowledge to perform a particular task. The present paper tries to assess the role of the faculty members in degree colleges located in rural areas consisting of students with least or no knowledge of information literacy, in disseminating and introducing to the students the usage and importance of information literacy in their academics.*

*The burden of introducing information literacy to the students ultimately lies on the shoulders of the faculty members especially in the colleges located in rural areas where the students do not have adequate access to tools of information literacy and it is the right of every student coming from a rural background to be exposed to tools of information literacy.*

### INTRODUCTION

Today, information has become a major economic commodity and citizens need to be educated for productive information use from pre-school through post secondary education. Faculty play an important role in the education of the youth for effective and efficient information use by teaching them information skills at all levels of education to enable them to be informed citizens of the country. In this information rich world, where the scope of available information appears limitless, there is a growing need for students to become critical users of information.

It not only includes knowing how to locate internet resources but focuses upon developing the skills necessary in seeking information from a variety of resources. What information is found is not important, but the usage of that information to complete the assigned task or research is of great importance.

Tremendous progress has taken place with the introduction of computers and communication technologies affecting every aspect of the human life. A huge amount of information is being generated in a variety of formats, all over the world, raising the question on its credibility, reliability and authenticity and as a result, individuals are puzzled by abundance of information and the diversified resources available for finding solutions to their problems.

In such an environment of information overload, the acquisition, organization retrieval and

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dissemination of information has not only become essential in today's date but beyond that an individual needs to be taught research skills and logical thinking to effectively use the information. It is related to awareness and knowledge and is one of the basic fundamental rights of individual.

Every institution should foster optimal use of its learning resources through strategies designed to help students develop skills of information literacy. It is essential to have an active and continuing program of library orientation and instruction in accessing information developed collaboratively and supported actively by faculty members, librarians, academicians and other information providers.

For every information need, a search engine (mostly Google and Yahoo) is a one-stop solution. Students increasingly rely upon the internet as their first and favoured tool for finding information. The faculty members have an important role in preparing and exposing the student.

### OBJECTIVES

1. The present paper tries to assess the role of the faculty members in disseminating and introducing to the students the usage and importance of skills of information literacy in their academics.
2. To analyze the challenges in spreading awareness about information literacy among students and finding the various possible ways to tackle these hindrances.

### METHODOLOGY

Secondary data collected from books, journals, news papers, libraries and search engines were used in preparing this paper.

### INFORMATION LITERACY

Paul Zurkowski, the President of Information Industry Association, in 1974 introduced the concept of information literacy for the first time in a proposal submitted to the US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS).

He defined Information Literacy as, "People trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for using the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in moulding information solutions to their problems." (V R Shelar 2011)

IL teaches individuals to find, evaluate, sought, filter and use information effectively. This enhances student's perception and joy for learning.

Information literacy (IL) promotes development of critical thinking, helps individual to become more self-directed, and presume greater control over their own learning.

"Information literacy is a prerequisite for lifelong learning and is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to engage critically with content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning" (V R Shelar, 2011)

### CONCEPTS SYNONYMOUS TO INFORMATION LITERACY

Often information literacy is used erroneously with synonyms like library literacy, media literacy, computer literacy, network literacy and digital literacy. The concept of information literacy is broad and encompasses all the above mentioned types of literacies and focuses on student empowerment to do independent and self directed research. The present paper assesses the role of the faculty members at the higher education level in spreading awareness about one of the most important components associated with the information literacy, that is, computer literacy.

### SEVEN SKILLS THAT MAKE A PERSON INFORMATION LITERATE are the ability to

1. Recognize information need
2. Distinguish ways of addressing the gap
3. Construct strategies for locating
4. Locate and Access
5. Compare and evaluate
6. Organize, apply and communicate
7. Synthesise and create (S Rajaram, 2006)

### NEED FOR INFORMATION LITERACY

It is only a thinking community that can progress and grow. Even at the individual level, in today's increasingly complex world with an equally complex information environment, only those who are information literates alone can be successful. Today there is a need to make society aware of the overflow of information being generated in different forms and formats.

Students should be taught to use these electronic gadgets by conducting information literacy programmes at different educational levels especially in rural areas where the use of the skills relating to information literacy are meagre due to problems like power shortages, lack of infrastructure required to use these gadgets and lack of skilled personnel to teach these skills to note a few. Information literacy inculcates in students to develop a critical thinking approach that would ultimately lead to economic and cultural progress of a nation.

Information Literacy initiatives have to be designed as per the needs of the rural students so as to impart easy flow of such knowledge to these students and concentrate on the outcome of the development of computer literacy. Students should be taught to respect the author's rights, appreciate and acknowledge the piece of information that they have referred to in their research work. And this can be taught by none other than their faculty members while assigning them with projects and quoting references in their assignments.

### INFORMATION LITERACY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education aims at imparting better understanding and perception amongst students to make good citizens out of them. It helps achieve greater degree of proficiency for self development. Moreover, it is the academic community which is the largest consumer of the information technology. Higher education stands on three pillars:

1. Teaching Learning process
2. Research and
3. Extension

In today's environment of rapid technological change, a paradigm shift has occurred in content as well as pedagogy. The shift is seen from conventional teaching method to ICT based instruction. Every school, college and university is trying to use ICT into learning programme to make students information literates. Students are supposed to develop a variety of competencies at the end of the academic course they are pursuing. Challenges of developing information literacy in Higher Education depends on

1. Diversified subjects at the academic level,
2. Dynamic curriculum framework and
3. Faculty members endeavour

Dissemination of information is alone not sufficient, instead the user of information should be taught to make the best use of the options provided to enhance their knowledge to perform a particular task. The curriculum prescribed by the University, especially in subjects of social sciences and humanities does not encourage, enhance and incorporate logical thinking and research skills among the students. This could be overcome by faculty members by incorporating information literacy at a young age. Even though separate marks are not allotted for learning these skills, the pedagogies may use project, classroom presentations and assignment methods to develop such skills. In this context the faculty members need to play a vital role in promoting information literacy among students and expose them to diverse opportunities. It is via faculty members these skills would percolate to the students. Where, on one hand, students residing in urban cities are exposed to these skills right from their primary levels, the students living in rural areas do not have access to IL till they reach their higher education levels.

### CHALLENGES IN DISSEMINATING IL SKILLS TO STUDENTS

1. In spite of the immense teaching experience among the faculty in the colleges, it is often found that they lack the knowledge of ICT and hence show least interest in using ICT in their classroom teaching.
2. Poor knowledge of the basics of computer among the faculty keeps them away from the usage of ICT. In such a situation one cannot expect the percolation of the skills of information literacy to the students.
3. Faculty are paralysed by shortcomings such as lack of personal computers in the institutions, internet

connectivity, dearth of computer trainers and regular power cuts in the rural areas which limit the faculty from teaching their students the skills of information literacy.

4. Passive role of the faculty in shaping the curriculum of the students of social sciences and Humanities at the university level is another challenge to be tackled. They are bound to teach the syllabus prescribed and prepared by few of the senior faculty members in the Board of Studies. The curriculum set for these students does not include computer basics and hence the students are forced to learn computer course elsewhere individually at their own cost. And this hinders the faculty from teaching ICT in colleges.

5. Poor browsing habits of the faculty for gathering information to enrich their knowledge and keep pace with the dynamics in the subjects they teach confines them to applying conventional methods of teaching instead of using ICT and restricts them from encouraging and advising their students to visit websites for gathering information to prepare notes and assignments.

6. Very few members of the faculty in rural areas are aware of the usage of teaching aids like LCD, Projector, Google books, Slide Shares, Search engines, You tubes and electronic headphones. Hence they are unable to spread awareness about their usage among the students.

#### HOW CAN THESE CHALLENGES BE TACKLED

1. Arranging orientation and refresher courses for the faculty at regular intervals would help the faculty with least knowledge of ICT and conducting workshops regarding the ways to spread awareness about skills of information literacy to the students would serve the purpose.

2. Sanctioning of PCs even to the institutions located in the most remote corners with internet connectivity, efficient computer trainer and rechargeable batteries to support the systems during long hours of power cuts.

3. To include computer education for all conventional streams as a compulsory subject so as to enable the students belonging even to these courses gain knowledge about the computer and its uses in their learning process and preparation of the assignments.

4. In this information rich world students must be encouraged by the faculty to gather information from diverse sources like using various search engines while preparing a project or an assignment or class notes so as to improve their research work and present it in a more polished manner.

5. When teachers make use of teaching aids like LCD, Projector, Google books, Slide Shares, Search engines, You tubes and electronic headphones, this helps them introduce to the students with a wide range of aids for learning and in turn helps spread awareness about the importance of information literacy.

6. There is a necessity of collaboration of the efforts of the faculty members and the librarians in their concerned colleges to effectively impart classroom curriculum through ICT which would positively impact student's academic achievement.

7. To spread the knowledge of Information Literacy Programmes and conducting such programmes in colleges so as to help the students gain information about the skills of information literacy and its usage in their day to day academics.

#### CONCLUSION

After having analysed the concept of information literacy, need and importance, its relevance to higher education, challenges the faculty face in spreading information literacy among students, we could identify a few solutions to face these challenges and spread information literacy among the rural students on par with the urban students in a more effective manner so as to make them competent to face the growing challenges of globalization.

From the above made analysis, one can conclude that, for spreading information literacy among the students studying in rural areas facing challenges, the faculty members play a decisive role. For this, it is necessary for the faculty members themselves to gain the knowledge of information literacy and incorporate it in their day to day classroom teaching. It is an ongoing process both for the faculty members and the students.

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